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GANGASHTAKAM by Shri Shridharavenkatesa of

Tiruvisanallur respectfully called as Ayyaval.

|| శ్రీ అయ్యవాల ఇతి ప్రసిద్ధైః శ్రీధరవేంకటేశాభిధైః విరచితమ్ ||

Introduction:- Once, the author Shridhara had to perform the shrAddha ceremony wherein his ancestors are propitiated. In this ceremony three pious brahmins who are well versed in the vedas and are of exemplary character are invited. The Manusmriti gives details about the qualifications of the brahmins to be invited on this occasion. The forefathers are invoked in them. Then these brahmins are honoured, as one would do his ancestors with food, clothes and dakShina. In Shridhara's case the ceremony fell on an Amavasya day in the month of Kartika (8th month of the solar calendar). He had made all arrangements to conduct the ceremony as ordained in the shastras, including inviting the three brahmins. The food items to be served to the brahmins (who represent his ancestors) were being cooked. As the preparations were in progress, he heard the plaintive cry of a beggar. The beggar was an outcaste. He said he had not eaten for hours, and so is famished and distressed. Shridhara, who was a very pious person, saw in this outcaste the image of Lord Siva and was immensely moved. He immediately gave the food items prepared for the shrAddha ceremony to the beggar and ensured his hunger was appeased. He beggar ate heartily and went away after invoking Lord's blessings on Shridhara and his family members. Shridhara came to himself some time after the beggar went away and realised his "folly". One is not expected to serve the

food prepared specifically for serving to the ancestors (invoked in the brahmins) to anyone else till the ceremony was over. He was very upset and asked the brahmins as to how he should expiate for his act. They said that the only way to atone is to take a bath in the sacred Ganges. But Shridhara felt that this was impossible to be done as the trip to Ganges will take many weeks. This implied that he will not be able to perform the shrAddha ceremony on that day. So it will be an act of ommission and will invite serious sin. Shridhara felt that the only thing to do in such a predicament is to surrender to the Lord. So, in the following verses he explained his predicament to Lord Siva and prayed to Him to release Ganga from His matted locks as He did on an earlier occasion in response to the prayers of sage Bhagirata. The kindly Lord could not bear to see His devotee upset. So He released Ganga from His locks. The well in Shridhara's house started to overflow. Many animals like fish, tortoises came out along with the gushing waters. The villagers were astounded at the sight and were wonderstuck at the intensity of Shridhara's piety. They realised his greatness. They requested him to control the flow of the water which was threatening to flood the village. Shridhara prayed and the flow from Ganges subsided. All, including the brahmins who had been invited specially for the ceremony were only too willing to accept that if Shridhara took bath in the waters of the well it will be equal to a bath in the Ganges. Shridhara was very happy at the decision of the brahmins. He took bath in the water drawn from the well and completed the shrAddha ceremony.

This incident is celebrated every year on the

Amavasya day in the month of Krittika at the village. The faithful

throng in large number at the house in Tiruvisanallur village where Shridhara lived on that day every year and take bath in the water drawn from the well. They believe that the bath gives the same benefit as a bath in the Ganges.

COMMENTS. The scriptures

assure that a true devotee will not encounter misfortune or problems in life. न वासुदेवभक्तानां अशुभं विद्यते क्वचित्। says

Vishnusahasranama in the phalashruti. Lord Krishna gives an assurance to this effect in Gita (9-31). कौन्तेय प्रसिद्धं हि न मे भक्तः

प्रसिद्धं। The question, then, is why should devotees like

Shridhara and many others like Prahladha face problems? The answer is that the problems they face may be attributed to prArabdham or deeds they might have committed in their past births. But, though the problem appears to be of serious nature to us, it does not appear to be so to the devotees themselves. They do not lose their serenity in the face of adversity, nor is there least change in their devotion.

ఘృష్టం ఘృష్టం పునరపి పునశ్చన్దనం చారు గంధం

చిన్నం చిన్నం పునరపి పునః స్వాదు చై-వేక్షుఖణ్డమ్ ।

దగ్ధం దగ్ధం పునరపి పునః కాఞ్చనం కాన్తవర్ణం

న ప్రాణాన్తే ప్రకృతివికృతిః జాయతే సజ్జనానామ్ ॥

This says that a piece of sandal wood, when repeatedly rubbed against a stone emits only a pleasant flavour. Even when the sugarcane is cut into many pieces it will continue to taste sweet only. A chunk of gold when heated in the fire again and again will give out its natural shine only. So also, the qualities of the great people will not undergo the least change even at the end of their lives. To repeat, a devotee of the Lord will certainly encounter problems. They are

designed by the Lord to bring out the devotee's unshakeable faith in the Lord so that others may understand his greatness. The devotee himself never complains that he is undergoing immense suffering. But he thinks of the Lord as usual for help. He gets it and is happy that his problem is solved. In fact, Kunti-the mother of Pandavas, cleverly converted the problems into advantage. She found from experience that she thought of the Lord whenever she faced a problem. Krishna promptly appeared on the scene and helped her. So, she prayed to Krishna that she should face problems every now and then so that she can have His darshan often. She said:

విపదః సన్తు నః శశ్యత్తత్ర తత్ర జగధురో

భవతో దర్శనం యస్మాదపునర్భవ-దర్శనమ్॥ Shri Bhagavatam (1-8-25).

The verses of Gangashtakam are given below. The translations of the verses given here are not exact.

శంభో భవన్నామ నిరస్తరానుసన్ధాన భాగ్యేన భవస్తమేవ ।

యద్యేవ సర్వత్ర తథాఽన్యజేఽద్య పశ్యత్యహో కోఽత్ర కృతోఽపరాధః ॥ ౧॥

O Lord Shambhu! I am used to repeating Your name all the time. As a result I am blessed to see You only every where. So, today I saw You only in this outcaste also. Is there anything wrong in this?

అస్త్యేష మన్తుః పితృయజ్ఞ నిష్ఠే గజాప్లవో యో విహితోఽపచిత్యై ।

దూరాత్తు తన్నామజపేన శుద్ధిః న స్యాత్ కథం మే స్మృతిరర్థవాదః ॥ ౨॥

Let me agree that a bath in the Ganges is the proper atonement for my transgression of the rules pertaining to the shrAddha ceremony. But the Smriti texts

say that even if one just repeats the name "Ganga" few times he becomes pure. Can not I take recourse to this expediency in this situation?

త్వన్నామనిష్ఠా న హి తావతో మే శ్రద్ధా యతః కర్మసు న ప్రదగ్ధా ।
త్రైశంకవం మే పసుపాస్తరాయః ముచ్యేయ తస్మాత్కథం ఆర్తబన్ధో ॥ ౩॥

O Lord, I accept that I have not got that intense faith in Your name that I can give up performance of duties like shrAddha. Thus I am in an awkward situation, like king Trishanku. How do I get relieved from this situation?

యద్యద్య తే శ్రాద్ధవిసష్ఠిరిష్ఠా కోఽహం తతోఽన్యచ్ఛరితుం సమర్థః ।
శ్రాద్ధే వృతాః పూర్వదిన్వోపవాసాః నాన్యత్ర భుజ్జోయుః ఇదం తు ఖిద్యే ॥ ౪॥

If it is Your wish that the shrAddha should be missed let it be lost. I cannot go against Your will. But, what about the brahmins who have been specially invited for the occasion? They have been fasting since yesterday and will not take food at any other place.

శ్రద్ధాలవః శ్రాద్ధవిఘాతభీత్యా స్వాత్మోపరోధం విఘ్నయ్య ధీరాః ।
యత్ప్రేచురత్రాపచితిం మహాన్తః తత్రోచితం యద్దయయా విధేహి ॥ ౫॥

These brahmins are noble souls. They have prescribed the expiation, not with any selfish motive but only to make sure that the shrAddha should not become deficient in any manner. They have not taken into account the inconvenience that they will face in the process.

గణ్ఢాధర! త్వద్భజనాస్తరాయ భీత్యా గృహే కూపకృతావగాహః ।
జానే న తీర్థాస్తరం అద్య గణ్ఢం ఆసాదయేయం కథమార్తబన్ధో ॥ ౬॥

On account of the

fear that the chanting of Your name should not be interrupted even for a moment, I have been taking bath only in the well in the house itself. I do not know any other holy river or waters.

This being the case, how will I go in search of Ganga?

నాహం తపస్వీ సగరన్యవాయః జానే న జహహ్నుః చరతి క్వవేతి ।
శంభో! జటాజుటమపావృణుష్యేత్యభ్యర్థనే నాలమయం వరాకః ॥ ౭॥

I am not an ascetic like Bhagiratha nor do

I know the whereabouts of the sage Jahnu. I am not qualified even to pray to You to release Ganga from Your locks.

గణ్ఢాధరాఖ్యా గతిరత్ర నాన్యా తామాశ్రయే సజ్కుట-మోచనాయ ।
హస్త! ప్రవాహః కథమత్ర కూపే విస్ఫూర్ణతీశః ఖలు తే ప్రసన్నః ॥ ౮॥

So, Your name Gangadhara is my refuge. I see

no other way out. Oh! What a wonder! Even as i say this, I see the well overflowing! surely, the Lord has shown mercy.

గజ్ఢేతి గజ్ఢేతి హరతి గృణ్ఢన్ ఆప్లావితోహం దయయా పురారేః ।
కూపోత్తితోయం కరుణాప్రవాహః గాఙ్గశ్చిరాయాత్ర జనాన్ పునాతు ॥ ౯॥

As I repeat the name "Ganga", the very mercy

of the Lord has taken the form of a flood and submerged me. May this flow of the waters of Ganga purify the people in the days to come.

CONCLUSION. One may ask as to how it was possible for

Shridhara to have a vision of Siva in a beggar. The answer is that he was convinced that every thing in this world is the Lord only and there is no second thing. Krishna says this in the Bhagavad

Gita. He explains that He manifests Himself as the world using the power of maya. Though He is every thing in the world, people are deluded by the powerful maya. Their vision is veiled. They see the objects and overlook the God behind them. As an example, we see that several ornaments are made of a piece gold. They are given various names like bangle, chain etc. If we think a bit we will find that the word "bangle" is not a substance but only a name given to a particular shape of gold. Gold can exist as gold but bangle cannot exist without the gold. Similarly, a person can go to sleep and have a dream. The dream is not substantial and is dependant on the dreamer; but not the other way round. Such things as the ornament that have no separate existence but have shape and name are called unreal objects or మిథ్యా వస్తు . They do not have a permanent existence. A bangle may be melted and made into another ornament any number of times. They are therefore impermanent or అనిత్యమ్। But the items like gold that lend substance to them are known as real or సత్యమ్। . They are permanent or నిత్యమ్ . They do not change when the ornament is changed. We may say that gold pervades the bangle as, really speaking, there is no such thing as bangle. Krishna says He pervades the entire universe.

మయా తతమిదం సర్వం జగదవ్యక్త-మూర్తినా। Gita(9-4). The right knowledge will, then, be to understand first that the ornament is gold. Overlooking the very existence of gold will be a major error and will have serious consequences. Extending this idea, we should be able to see that every thing in this universe విశ్వమ్ is impermanent and changing. People and animals come and go. So do the seas and mountains. We learn that even the sun and the stars are not permanent but have limited life only. Thus, the universe is

అనిత్యమ్ only. These impermanent, changing objects are many names and forms of the Lord only. In other words God is the real thing or సత్యమ్ . God gives substance to the world and is the substratum or అధిష్టానమ్। Krishna explains this to Arjuna and says the right vision is to see Him every where. But we are taken by the world and do not see the God hiding behind it. To start with, we do not see the Lord within us, but identify ourselves with the bodies. This results in numerous problems. We have to take care of the body, ensure it is fed and clothed properly. We require so many things to protect it and keep it happy and secure. To get all these things we have to work hard. The need for comfort and security makes us desire many things. We get a family and friends around ourselves. We import their joys and sorrows on to ourselves. This leads to likes and dislikes. We like things and people who add to our joy and comforts and dislike those who do not. This corrupts our minds. As we go on working hard for ourselves and our family and friends, we do many things that are right and many times compromise with values and do wrong things. The results are puNyam and pApam. We have to enjoy the fruits of the puNyam and pApam in our account and to do this we have to take one or many births. Repeated births and deaths is sorrow only. The only way out of this problem is to have the right vision that shows that God is in every thing and every where. Yama tells this to Nachiketha in Kathopanishad. (2-1-10).

యదేవేహ తదముత్ర యదముత్ర తదన్విహః।

మృత్యోః స మృత్యుమాప్నోతి య ఇహ నానేవ పశ్యతి॥

He says that one who sees plurality is

condemned to be born and die again and again. Krishna says that

by intense devotion one gets an understanding of the Lord's true nature and gets such a right vision. Gita (18-55).

భక్త్యా మాం అభిజానాతి యావాన్యశ్చాస్మి తత్త్వతః।

Thus a true devotee is able to see the Lord in every being.

విద్యావినయ-సంపన్నే బ్రాహ్మణే గవి హస్తిని ।

శుని చైవ శ్వపాకే చ పణ్డితాః సమదర్శినః॥ Gita (5-18).

He says that a person endowed with wisdom sees the same brahman in a brahmin endowed with wisdom and humility, in a cow, an elephant as also in a dog, and in an outcaste who eats a dog. Sage Narada said the same in his advice to Yudishtira. Bhagavatha (7-14-9).

మృగోష్ఠ-ఖర-మర్కాఖు-సరీసృప్థగమక్షికాః ।

ఆత్మనః పుత్రవత్ పశ్యేత్ తైరేషామన్తరం కియత్ ॥

One should look upon a deer, camels, donkeys, monkeys, rats, reptiles, birds and flies as though they were his own children. What is it that makes them separate from these (own children)?

The vedic seers had this grand vision. The great vedic hymn Shri Rudram has three hundred salutations to the Lord, not by His names, but as being available in various beings, both animate and inanimate. He is saluted as being the one available in the streams, shoals, clouds, lightnings, trees, grass, animals like horses, vultures and even in cheats and thieves! Because the hymn contains such a lofty idea its recitation is very inspiring. But, everyone may not be expected to study the scriptures like the upanishads, Gita and Shri Rudram. Understanding this limitation of the people in general our rishis had incorporated these valuable ideas in the popular hymns.

We see these names encountered above విశ్వమ్ , సత్యః , and

అధిష్ఠానమ్ in the Vishnusahasranamam. One of Lalita's names in Lalitasahasranamam (No. 734) మిథ్యాజగదధిష్ఠానా (i.e.) She is the substratum of this unreal universe, says this fact explicitly. As we keep on reading or reciting these prayers, the great vedantic truths contained in them will gradually enter our mind and change our concept of God. That is why we have the practice of pArAyaNam or reciting such stotras daily. By repeated reading we will understand that God is not a Being residing in remote places like Vaikuntha or Kailasa, but He is very intimately available in any thing we see or hear about - including our bodies. This is said in the Narayana Suktam

యచ్చ కించిజ్జగత్సర్వం దృశ్యతే శ్రూయతేఽపి వా ।

అస్తర్భహిశ్చ తత్సర్వం వ్యాప్య నారాయణస్థితః।

Understanding and accepting the facts stated above will cause a great change in our personality and attitude. We will know that we are surrounded by God resident in all things and beings. So, we are never alone or away from Him. This idea will give us great sense of security, as we can get His help at any time or place.

Krishna says this in Gita(6-30).

యో మాం పశ్యతి సర్వత్ర సర్వం చ మయి పశ్యతి ।

తస్యాహం న ప్రణశ్యామి స చ మే న ప్రణశ్యతి ॥

Since He is in all things and beings we will show great respect and love for them. We will enjoy immense peace of mind and confidence. This is how the great men like the sages and saints could be calm and enjoyed happiness. Thus Shridhara's experience teaches us an important lesson to be followed in life.

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